A Casual Tour

Boston Public Library

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BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY

WELCOME

to Boston's Central Library Building

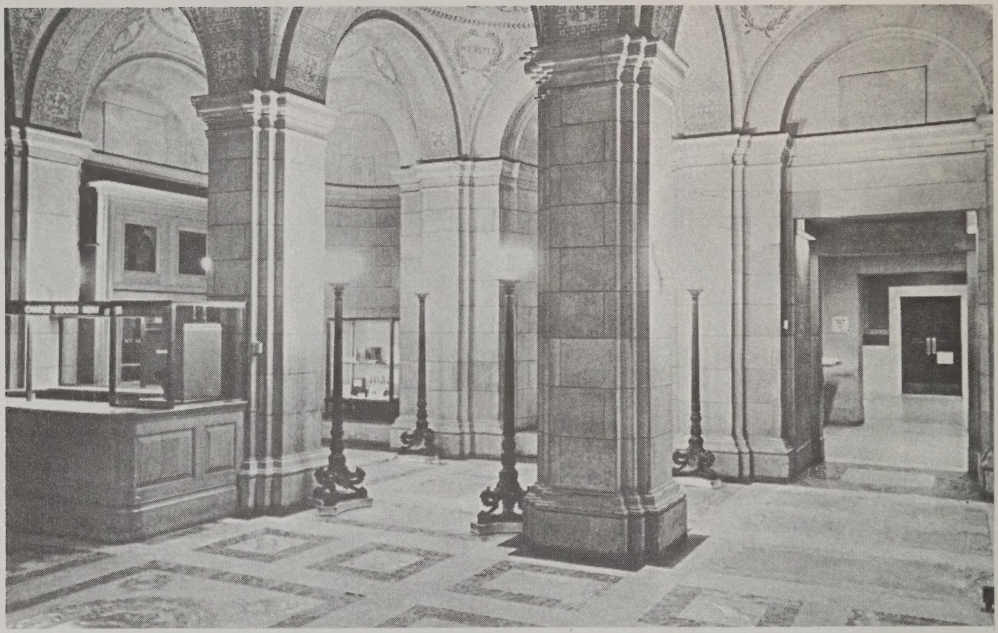
THE CENTRAL LIBRARY BUILDING—Earliest of the nation's monumental public library buildings, Boston's Central Library, facing Copley Square and H. H. Richardson's Trinity Church, represents a landmark in the development of American architecture. Its architect, Charles Follen McKim, taking his inspiration from the classical models of the Italian Renaissance, set a new standard of taste and aristocratic elegance for American public buildings.

A CASUAL TOUR

The Central Library Building is notable for its perfect proportions, its classic serenity, its modestly-borne elegance. Its charm lies not only in the immediate effect of its major features—its Copley Square façade, the Main Stair Hall, the Courtyard, the Main Reading Room, the Sargent Gallery—but in the details and the ornamentation that everywhere make the building a constant source of surprise and aesthetic satisfaction. Many (but by no means all) of these unobtrusive touches of the genius of the architect, Charles Follen McKim, are pointed out in notes that follow.

Exterior Details

A strong impression of the façade is likely to remain in the mind's eye—the sloping red tile roof with its green copper cresting, the magnificent arched windows, the triple-arched main entrance and its cluster of branching wrought-iron lanterns, etc. Closer inspection reveals the tablets beneath the window arches, inscribed with the names of great masters of art, science, religion, and statesmanship; the line of medallions, cut in granite in the spandrels of the window arches, which represent the colophons or trade-devices of the early printers and booksellers, skillfully executed by sculptor Domingo Mora; the helmeted head of Minerva, goddess of wisdom, carved in the keystone of the arch of the central entrance, by Mora and Augustus St. Gaudens; and, sculptured in granite over the entrance arches, three panels depicting the seals of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the Library, and the City of Boston, by Augustus St. Gaudens.



MAIN ENTRANCE HALL—The entrance to the Central Library Building offers a succession of pleasing architectural effects: the broad granite exterior platform, the impressive entrance gateway, the splendid entrance vestibule, and then—leading directly to the building's beautiful main staircase—the broad, low entrance hall (above) with its heavy piers of Iowa sandstone, white Georgia marble floor, and marble mosaic ceiling. In the foreground of this view is a part of the center aisle, looking toward the south corridor and the entrance to the Children's Room (at the right), and toward one of the charging-out desks and one of the two entrance-ways, on the left. Inlaid in brass on the floor of the center aisle may be seen the Library's seal and one of the signs of the zodiac. The names in the ceiling are those of famous Bostonians.

The Entrance Vestibule

The floor, walls, and vaulted ceiling are of pink Knoxville marble; the floor is inlaid with patterns of brown Knoxville and Levanto marble. The three doorways leading to the entrance hall are copied from the entrance to the Temple of Erectheus on the Acropolis of Athens.

The bronze statue in the deep niche on the left as one enters the vestibule is by Frederic MacMonnies. The richly dressed and dashing cavalier is a representation of Sir Henry Vane, youthful Governor of Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1636 and 1637. An aristocrat, but also a Puritan, he was beheaded in 1662, in England, for rebellion against the King. The statue was presented to the Library by Dr. Charles G. Weld, of Boston, in honor of James Freeman Clark, D.D., an eminent Unitarian minister who was, at the time of his death, a trustee of the Library.

On the three pairs of bronze doors leading to the Main Entrance Hall are allegorical figures sculptured in low relief and representing, respectively, Music and Poetry (left), Knowledge and Wisdom (center), and Truth and Romance (right). These handsome doors were done by Daniel Chester French, at a cost in 1894 of $25,000.

The Main Entrance Hall

The low, broad, entrance hall, divided into three aisles by heavy piers of Iowa sandstone, is of Roman design. The ceiling is vaulted, with domes in the side bays, and is covered with a marble mosaic. The thirty names lettered in the ceiling are those of famous Bostonians (see a list of these on page 10). The floor is of white Georgia marble and is inlaid in the center aisle with brass letters and figures; near the entrance an inscription commemorating the founding of the Library (1852) and the beginning of the construction of the Copley Square building (1888); farther on, the Library seal (originally designed by Kenyon Cox);

MAIN STAIRCASE—Included in this picture of the lower section of the Main Staircase, photographed with a wide-angle lens, are a part of the marble floor and the marble mosaic ceiling of the Central Library's Main Entrance Lobby, and, at the mezzanine level, where the staircase branches and doubles back and upward, the doorway to the balcony overlooking the Courtyard and one of the monumental lions that flank the approach to the second main floor level.

WINCHESTER · 1862 · CEDAR MOUNTAIN ·
ANTIETAM · CHANCELLORSVILLE ·
GETTYSBURG · RESACA · ATLANTA ·
THE MARCH TO THE SEA · SAVANNAH ·
SHERMANS CAROLINA CAMPAIGN ·

STAIRCASE LION—Regal is the pose of the two marble lions placed on pedestals at the halfway landing of the Central Library's Main Staircase. Carved by Louis St. Gaudens, they are memorials to two Massachusetts infantry regiments of the Civil War. On the base of each pedestal are the names of battles and campaigns in which the regiments participated.

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and, near the bottom steps of the Main Staircase, in a wreath of laurel, the surnames of eight men prominently connected with the establishment and early history of the Library.

Visitors often ask about these gentlemen. They include three early trustees, Edward Everett, John Prescott Bigelow (who was, earlier, Mayor of Boston), and George Ticknor; Josiah Quincy, Jr., Mayor of Boston; Robert C. Winthrop, early benefactor; Charles Coffin Jewett, the institution's first great librarian (1858–1868); and Alexander Vattemare, the ubiquitous Frenchman whose zeal for the international exchange of books helped to stir the ferment that led to the founding of the Library.

The Main Staircase

Connecting the Main Entrance Hall with the Main Staircase is a deep triumphal arch. The marble of the steps is ivory-gray Echaillon, mottled with fossil shells; that of the walls is a richly variegated yellow Siena. Is there anywhere in America a staircase, and stair hall, as rich and magnificent as this? Henry James (quoted by David McCord in his "as built/with second thoughts, reforming what was old") once wrote of "its amplitude of wing and its splendor of tawny marble, a high and luxurious beauty."

The great twin lions, couchant, on pedestals at the turn of the stairs, are of unpolished Siena marble and are the

work of Louis St. Gaudens, brother of Augustus. They are memorials to Massachusetts Civil War infantry regiments, the Second and the Twentieth. The handsome coffered ceiling is of plaster, cream-colored and light blue, divided into large rosetted panels with borders ornamented with Renaissance modelling.

Puvis de Chavannes Gallery

The second-floor corridor at the head of the staircase is known as the Puvis de Chavannes Gallery (often shortened to "Chavannes") after the French artist whose mural paintings decorate both the corridor and the entire upper portion of the Main Stair Hall. The gallery is separated from the Main Staircase itself by an arcade which consists of five arches supported by graceful columns resting on the posts of a low parapet directly over the stairwell. Like the staircase, the arcade is of yellow Siena marble. The floor of the Chavannes Gallery (recently replaced in close conformance with the original specifications) is of yellow Verona, Bottichino (gray), Aldorado (dark gray), and Chiampo Perlato (reddish gray).

Mural Paintings

Covering the entire gallery wall to the left and right of the arched vestibule opening into the Main Reading Room is Puvis de Chavannes' major composition, "The Muses." Here the nine muses of Greek mythology are seen hailing a male figure representing the "Genius of Enlightenment" amidst the setting of a lovely grove of olive and laurel. The prevailing tone of the whole series is of classic serenity, and one carries away an impression of soft blues and greens that harmonize pleasingly with the mellow hues of the marble staircase and the Corinthian columns of the gallery.

The Abbey Room

Of particular interest to many visitors is the sumptuous Abbey Room, which may be entered from the south end of the Chavannes Gallery. Sixty-four feet long by thirty-three wide, the room's dominating feature is the series of splendid and richly-colored mural paintings, "The Quest of the Holy Grail," by the distinguished American artist, Edwin Austin Abbey. But the room itself, in the style of the early Venetian Renaissance, is of luxurious beauty. The ceiling is remarkable for its heavy ornamental rafters; the heavy, rich marble doorways leading into Bates Hall and from the Chavannes Gallery are of *rouge antique* and Levanto marble; the mantel of the great fireplace in the east wall—wholly of *rouge antique*—is exceedingly rich and elaborate. The walls are wainscotted in dark-colored oak to the level of the murals, and the floors are of Istrian and red Verona marble.

Temporary Uses

This room was originally the place where readers made application for books located in the main bookstacks and where they waited for their delivery. Here also was the office of the Supervisor, Division of Reference and Research Services. These two operations are no longer carried on here; the delivery outlet is in Bates Hall, and the office of the Supervisor (who is now called the Supervisor of Reader Services) is also in Bates Hall to the left of Center Desk. What the visitor sees now are row upon row of catalog cases making up the Public Card Catalog, tables upon which catalog trays may be placed, and, in front of the great fireplace, the Catalog Reference Desk.

The Gallery Lobbies

The lobbies at the two ends of the Chavannes Gallery are of interest for their decorative schemes. Pompeian red is the dominant note at the south end; and the decorative elements—masks, torches, sea horses, a lyre, and floral designs—are suggestive of Pompeii. The Venetian lobby, at the opposite end of the corridor, includes the domed central portion, the window alcove (with sea-green and sky-blue as the chief colors), and the entrance to the staircase to the Sargent Gallery. The block of stone over the arched entrance to Social Sciences bears a carving of the traditional Lion of St. Mark. It is of the sixteenth century and was brought from Venice, probably from an ancient palace.

The wall painting in the lunette over the alcove window represents the marriage of Venice with the Adriatic Sea. In

MAIN READING ROOM—Bates Hall has been described as being "like the hall of a great Roman bath, with decorative elements of the Italian Renaissance superimposed." Seeing it, one will not be surprised to learn that the architect, who conceived it as the building's most dominant single feature, also designed the great hall of old Pennsylvania Station in New York City.

the niche to the left the names in gilt are those of famous doges of Venice; in the opposite niche the names are of celebrated Venetian painters.

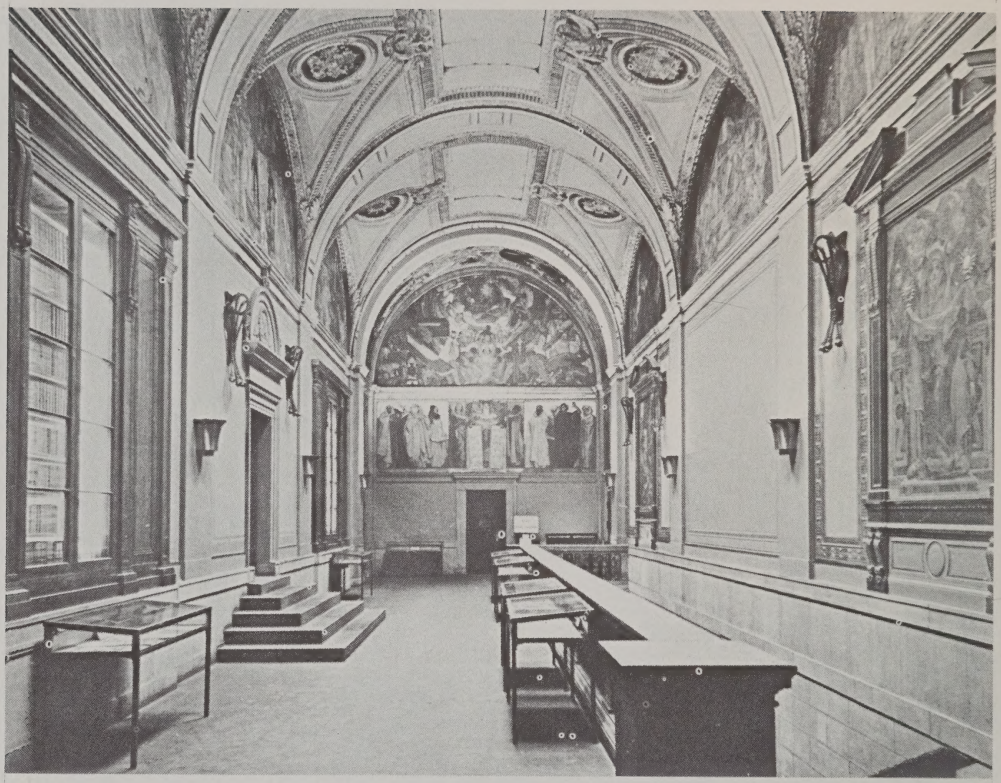
Decorations of the domes of the corridor and of the staircase landing suggest the glory of Venice at the height of her commercial and naval power. Around the lower circumference of the dome in the corridor is depicted a line of galleys, and the eleven cities which at one time or another were subjects of Venice. In the gilded dome of the staircase landing are Byzantine symbols and the names of Eastern Mediterranean possessions of Venice.

Elliott Room

Opening from the Venetian Lobby end of the Chavannes Gallery is Social Sciences. Unlike the Abbey Room, to which it corresponds in position and dimensions, this room is quite starkly plain, with little attempt at decoration. One passes halfway through it, and through the brown swinging door on its west wall, to enter the Elliott Room. Now temporarily accommodating Government Documents, the Elliott Room, finely proportioned, lined with high bookshelves on all four walls, and lighted by windows on the Courtyard and on Boylston Street, takes its name from the ceiling decoration, "The Triumph of Time," by the Boston artist John Elliott.

Main Reading Room

This magnificent room is named for Joshua Bates (1788–1864), the Library's first great benefactor. Occupying the whole front of the building on the second floor level and lighted by high, arched windows, it is 218 feet long, 42 feet wide, and 50 feet high, to the crown of its barrel-vaulted ceiling. This lofty ceiling,



SARGENT GALLERY—Named for John Singer Sargent, whose mural sequence "Judaism and Christianity" is its dominating feature, this third-floor hall is approached by a long stairway (right) and leads, at the far end, under the famous "Frieze of the Prophets," to Music and to the Rare Book Department. The steps and doorway at the center of the hall lead to the Treasure Room. At the end of the hall near the head of the stairs (not shown in the photograph) is the entrance to the Albert H. Wiggin Gallery through which one passes to reach the Print Department and, further on, Fine Arts.

deeply panelled, is of plaster, tinted a cream color and a delicate green. Supporting the arches are piers of soft brownish-gray sandstone.

The ends of the hall are semicircular, with half-domed ceilings. The balcony over the entrance from the Chavannes Gallery is of light-colored Indiana limestone, and is very elaborately carved with Renaissance ornament. Rich also are the heavy doorways from Bates Hall to Social Sciences and to the Abbey Room. The Corinthian columns that flank the doorways are of Alps green serpentine marble; the heavy architrave and cornice which each supports are of Alps green and black Belgian marble. On the west wall, also, are two Renaissance mantels of red Verona marble and carved sandstone. On these mantels, on the tops of bookcases, and on pedestals placed around the perimeter of the hall, are busts of famous authors and eminent Bostonians.

Apse Ends

In the south end of the hall, in an apse separated by an oak screen from the reading room area, are the offices of Reference and Humanities. Occupying a prominent spot on the upper wall of this apse is an oil portrait of Joshua Bates, by William E. West. In a corresponding location at the north end of the hall is Science Reference. The whole room seats 280 people at long heavy tables of American oak. "Center Desk" is the point at which readers submit call slips requesting the delivery of books that are in the main bookstacks.

COURTYARD VIEW—The interior court of the Central Library is a major architectural feature of the building. In a moment of reflection, Henry James once wrote that, in this place, "a wealth of science and taste has gone to producing a sense, when the afternoon light sadly slants, of one of the myriad gold-coloured courts of the Vatican."

Sargent Gallery

This long, high gallery is named for the great American artist John Singer Sargent, who spent years decorating its walls with his powerful and original mural sequence, "Judaism and Christianity." The gallery is reached from the Venetian Lobby (on foot) by a long straight flight of stairs, open to the hall above, leading between the wall of Bates Hall and the Chavannes Gallery. It is 84 feet long, 23 feet wide, and 26 feet high. The dark sandstone of the walls and the balustrade of the stairway and the absence of windows (artificial light now comes from the skylights in the vaulted ceiling) give the gallery a rather somber appearance.

Wiggin Gallery

At the south end of the Sargent Gallery is the entrance to the Albert H. Wiggin Gallery. Originally devoted to special collections, this large, admirably proportioned room was given over to the exhibiting of prints in 1941 when Mr. Albert H. Wiggin, Boston-born New York financier, gave to the Library his entire collection of prints and drawings. The print collection, developed steadily since that time, is exceptionally strong in the works of American and European artists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including, among many others, Toulouse-Lautrec, Forain, Daumier, Muirhead Bone, Whistler, Bellows, and McBey.

Features of this room are the handsome central dome, with moulded plaster ornamentation in leaf-and-berry patterns; the polished terrazzo floor; the pair of high, arched windows that look out over the Courtyard, and the display cases on all four walls of the main floor, and on those of a balcony level, as well. The balcony is approached from a small staircase at the far end of the room. Displayed on one wall of the stair hall are the original oil sketches made by John Singer Sargent in preparation for the painting of the murals that dominate the adjacent Sargent Gallery. The stairway leads both to the balcony and to the mezzanine level office of the Print Department.

Just off the Wiggin Gallery, by the entrance to Fine Arts, is the Little Gallery, where the series of dioramas, "Printmakers at Work," is on view.

The Courtyard

Next only to the quiet grandeur of the Main Staircase, the Central Library's deep interior court delights and charms the visitor. (Some, quite surprised to discover its existence, find that the Courtyard is the place in the Central Library in which they would most like to linger.) Nonfunctional in the extreme, in relation to efficient library operations, it is nevertheless a haven of peace and beauty such as is found but rarely in a building that is open freely to public visitation and use.

The wall of the Main Staircase projects well into the court, and along the other three walls runs an arcaded promenade which is an almost exact facsimile of the arcade of the first story of the Cancelleria Palace in Rome. The main walls of the arcade are of granite; the floor is red brick, with a wide border of white Georgia marble. The vaulted white ceiling of the arcade is plaster. According to the original handbook of the Central Library Building, the handsome columns, the high arches which they support, and the parapet above the arcade are all of white marble. The marble of the columns, from Tuckahoe, New York, is today a soft gray-white; the Georgia marble of the arches is gradually turning pale gold.

A CASUAL TOUR

Welcome to

Boston's Central Library Building

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——1971–1972——

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A Visitor's Directory to the Central Library Building

Listed below are many of the various parts of the building that a visitor might wish to see. The building is rectangular in shape, with a prominent courtyard at its center. The main entrance, on Dartmouth Street, faces *east*. Since a room may occupy a part of both the front (or rear) and a side of the building, the letters "NS" (north side) and "SS" (south side) are added, in many cases, to orient the visitor.

Note also that, as in a Florentine palace, one must often pass *through* one room to reach another, e.g., through the Wiggin Gallery to reach Fine Arts, through Social Sciences to reach Government Documents and Microtext.

Room, etc.	Floor	Location
Abbey Murals	2nd	Front (SS)
Audio-Visual	LL	Front (SS)
Bates Hall (Main Reading Room)	2nd	Front
Chavannes Murals	2nd	Front
Courtyard	1st	Center
Elliott Murals	2nd	North Side
Fine Arts	3rd	Rear (SS)
General Library	1st	Front (SS)
General Reference	2nd	Front (SS)
Government Documents	2nd	North Side
Humanities	2nd	Front (SS)
Microtext	2nd	North Side
Music	3rd	Front (NS)
Newspapers	1st	Front (NS)
Newspapers on Microfilm	2nd	North Side
Periodicals	1st	North Side
Print	3rd	Front (SS)
Public Catalog Information	2nd	Front (SS)
Rare Books and Manuscripts	3rd	North Side
Sargent Murals	3rd	Front
Sciences	2nd	Front (NS)
Social Sciences	2nd	Front (NS)
Wiggin Gallery	3rd	Front (NS)

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HOURS OF SERVICE

MONDAYS — FRIDAYS 9–9 **SATURDAYS 9–6**

SUNDAYS 2–6

(OCTOBER THROUGH MAY)

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Names of Famous Bostonians On Ceiling of Entrance Hall

The names in the mosaic ceiling of the Main Entrance Hall mystify some who stop to scan them. Many of them are familiar—names like Adams, Webster, Longfellow, Hawthorne. But who are those others: Eliot, Shaw, Peirce, and the like? And why are the names there at all?

The thirty surnames, put there two generations ago, are those of famous or distinguished Bostonians. A few of them were not Bostonians by birth—Agassiz (Switzerland), Webster (New Hampshire), and Hawthorne (Salem), for example—but had such strong connections with the city as to give Boston a valid claim upon them.

The full names of the thirty, plus the fields in which they won renown, are given below.

Main Aisle

In the main aisle: Benjamin Peirce, mathematician; John Adams, second President of the U. S.; Benjamin Franklin, statesman; Ralph Waldo Emerson, essayist, poet, philosopher; Nathaniel Hawthorne, novelist; and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, poet.

Side Aisle, Left

In the side aisle on the left as one enters: *the historians*, John Lothrop Motley, Francis Parkman, William Hickling Prescott, George Bancroft; *the jurists*, Joseph H. Choate, Lemuel Shaw, Joseph Story, and—placed with the great lawyers—the lawyer-statesman, Daniel Webster; *the theologians*, William Ellery Channing, Theodore Parker, Cotton Mather, John Eliot ("Apostle to the Indians").

Side Aisle, Right

In the side aisle on the right: *the reformers*, William Lloyd Garrison, Horace Mann, Wendell Phillips, Charles Sumner; *the artists*, Washington Allston, Gilbert Stuart, John Singleton Copley, Charles Bulfinch; *the scientists*, Louis Agassiz (naturalist), Nathaniel Bowditch (mathematician), Asa Gray (botanist), and Benjamin Thompson Rumford (physicist).

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Public Facilities and Guidance In Central Library Building

The *elevator* is in a lobby which is on the left as you face the Information Desk. *Public telephones and a drinking fountain* are in the same area.

Public lavatories are on the lower level in the front part of the building; they may be reached by the elevator, or by a narrow stairway off the south corridor (just beyond the public telephones), or by wider stairways in the General Library.

For *general directional information*, for *change*, for *postage stamps*, and for the *purchase of postcards* and other reproductions of art objects, the place to go is the Information Desk in the main entrance lobby. For the *location of library resources*, in general, ask the staff members at the desk in Reference and Humanities, i.e., in the apse at the south end of Bates Hall, second floor.

To register for borrowing privileges, apply at the Central Charging Records Office, first floor, north corridor, almost immediately to your right as you face the Book Return Desk in the Main Entrance Lobby.

THE SULTAN'S SONS—The three sons of a sultan of India arrive by magic carpet to restore the dying princess to health. One of the dioramas by Louise Stimson in the series "The Thousand and One Nights."

Into the Realms of Fancy

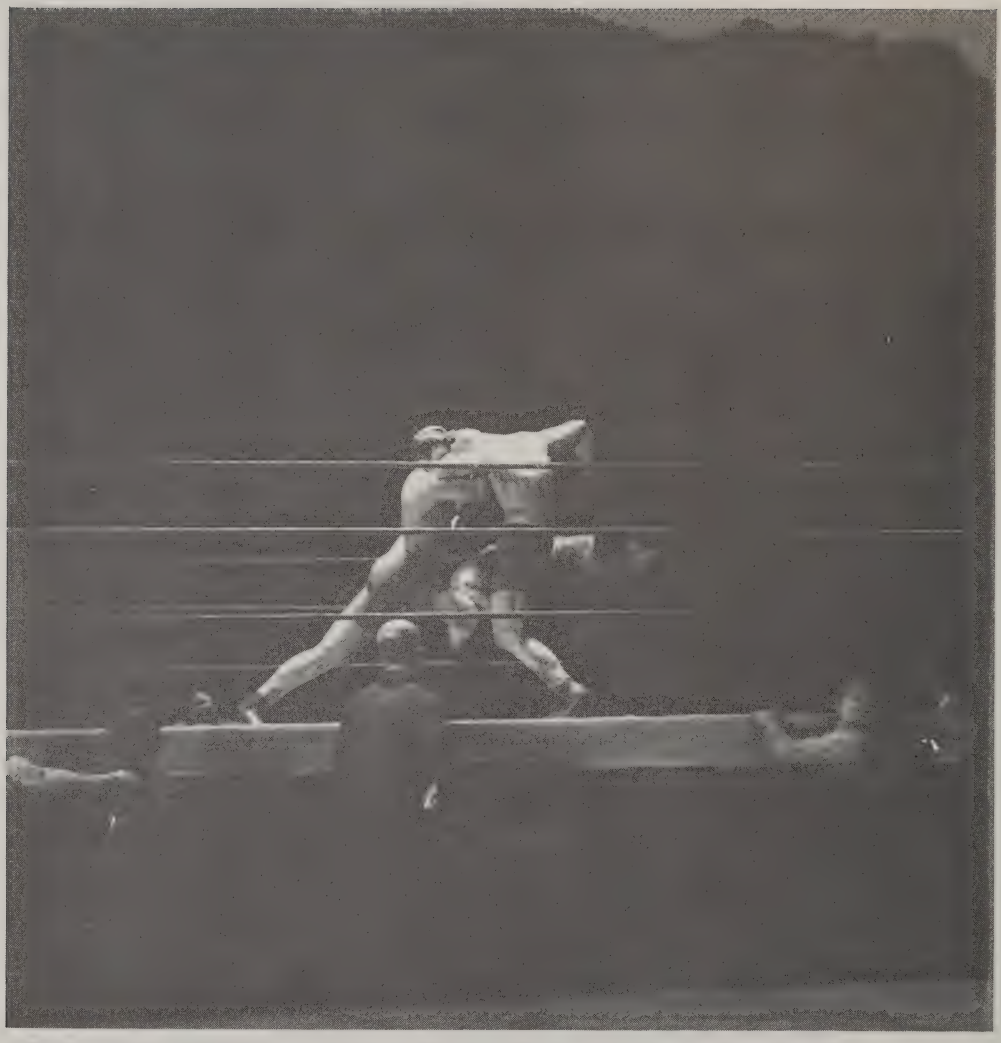
In different parts of the Central Library Building small sections have been set aside for the erection of other worlds—worlds of fancy, of fantasy, of the Micawbers, Alice, and Scheherazade. These are the dioramas of Louise Stimson of Concord, Massachusetts.

Those in the Children's Room, on the first floor, transport the viewer into the land of the Thousand and One Nights and the Wonderland of the little English girl who fell into a rabbit hole.

As with all of the dioramas, these have been constructed—from cardboard and bits of odds and ends—with an amazing amount of detail; often, where there are buildings, not only the exteriors are shown but also the interiors, completely furnished.

"The Thousand and One Nights" is made up of eleven scenes, bright with the colors of the Middle East. Sinbad the Sailor is there, Ali Baba, and Scheherazade herself, all engaged in the adventures for which they are famous.

On the other side of the room the viewer is borne from the bazaars of Cairo to the rolling English countryside of the nine-



STAG AT SHARKEY'S—A close-up of Louise Stimson's diorama, based on the lithograph by George Bellows, gives a startling sense of the scene as Bellows (pictured at left center, watching the fight) experienced it.

teenth century. The peace and serenity of the summer fields contrast with the mystery of Wonderland, and the violent madness of the courtroom where the Knave of Hearts is on trial for stealing the tarts.

Second Floor

In the Venetian Gallery, on the second floor, to the left of the Main Staircase, stands an imaginary square in old London, the London of Charles Dickens. Many of his most famous characters are to be found there, all going about their business, completely unaware that they are being watched by outsiders. Mr. Pickwick and his friends, high on top of the charging coach, are off on their pilgrimage, while old Scrooge scribbles away at his desk, straining his eyes in the dim candlelight. The Cheshire Cheese, the Old Curiosity Shop, and the tower of St. Dunstan's stand silent amidst all of this clamorous activity.

Third Floor

The Little Gallery, just off the Wiggin Gallery, houses "Printmakers at Work,"

a series of eleven dioramas based on prints in the Wiggin Collection, or on a "supposed" incident in a famous printmaker's life. In each of the scenes, along with the adaptation of the print, appears the figure of the artist himself, his features having been copied from a portrait or a photograph. Rembrandt, Whistler, and Toulouse-Lautrec are among the artists shown. Miss Stimson's art is readily apparent in the finely detailed scenes of a desert at dawn, a prizefight under the lights, a pure pastoral landscape.

North End

If you are following the Freedom Trail through Boston's North End section, visit the North End Branch Library, 25 Parmenter Street. There you'll find the largest of the dioramas, that of Venice's Ducal Palace. Placed in the period of the Republic's Golden Age, the frivolous, yet vigorous, sixteenth century, the pink palace (which was done by Miss Henrietta Macy, a former resident of the North End; the setting is by Miss Stimson) shimmers with light as it looks down on the color and gaiety of the teeming walks along the Grand Canal.

Whatever period she has picked, whatever characters she has chosen, Miss Stimson has successfully drawn out of them all the magic and the wonder they possess, the qualities which give them the power to entrance visitors to the Boston Public Library, year after year.

The Seal of the Public Library: Significance of the Details

Designed by Kenyon Cox, the noted illustrator, the seal of the Library shows two small boys, nude, holding the torches of learning and supporting a shield which bears an open book, and the dates, in Roman numerals, of the founding of the Library (1852) and of the incorporation of the Trustees by act of the Massachusetts Legislature (1878). Above the shield is the motto *Omnium Lux Civium*, "The Light of All Citizens." Below are two twisting dolphins which signify the maritime character of the city.

The seal may be seen in granite, over the main entrance; in brass, on the floor of the Main Entrance Hall; and in mosaic, on the floor of the anteroom of the Trustees Room.

ENTRANCE LANTERNS—Best seen from the side as one approaches the main entrance of the Central Library, or glimpsed from beneath, are large branched wrought-iron candelabra carrying clusters of six lanterns each. The photograph shows one of the four candelabra set above one of the heavy wrought-iron gates that close the entrance arches.

GALAHAD AND THE "SIEGE PERILOUS"—The photograph shows Galahad approaching the seat, fatal to all but himself, in the presence of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. Galahad is led by the shrouded spirit of Joseph of Arimathea. This is the third and largest of the fifteen panels that make up Edwin Austin Abbey's superb, glowing mural sequence, "The Quest of the Holy Grail," which adorns the beautiful room in the Central Library that bears the artist's name.

BPL's Murals World-Renowned

The Central Library Building is decorated with murals by some of the most famous artists of their time.

On the second floor, at the head of the Main Staircase, is the fresco "The Muses of Inspiration Hail the Spirit, the Harbinger of Light." The artist, Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, 1824–98, has sought —and very successfully—to represent here, in a symbolic form, the intellectual treasures available in the Library.

The art of Puvis de Chavannes has no kinship with that of any of his contemporaries. He is the successor and equal of the great fresco painters of the Italian Renaissance, and his work has much in common with that of Piero della Francesca. The influence of the philosophy of that age is seen in the great harmony of his pictures, the nobility of the postures of his figures, the charm of the details, and, above all, in his attempt to present great beauty in the form of classic repose.

The subsidiary panels, arranged on the upper walls of the staircase, depict the personification of various aspects of poetry, philosophy, history, and science.

Many consider this series to be the artist's masterpiece.

The Abbey Paintings

To the right of the Chavannes Gallery is the Abbey Room, where the Catalog Reference Desk and the Main Card Catalog are located. This beautiful Renaissance room, with its richly ornamented beamed ceiling and oak paneling, contains the murals of Edwin Austin Abbey

1852–1911, "The Quest of the Holy Grail." Because of this work, Mr. Abbey was honored with membership in the Institute of American Architects in 1895.

The artist chose this particular subject because it is one which is common to all literatures and to all countries. It symbolizes, then, the library, where all learning is stored. Abbey read every version of the legend and created an original one of his own, one which, he felt, was best suited to the project he was carrying out.

The series tells the story of Sir Galahad, a knight of King Arthur's Round Table, and his search for the sacred vessel used by Christ at the Last Supper. The narrative occupies fifteen panels which are noted for their brilliant coloring and for their ability to evoke the rich panoply and somber mood of the Middle Ages, as imagined by a gifted artist of the late nineteenth century.

The Sargent Gallery

The mural decorations "Judaism and Christianity" by John Singer Sargent, 1856–1925, on the third floor, were executed between 1890 and 1919. Owing to the artist's death six years later, the entire plan was never fully carried out, as the blank space in the middle of the east wall testifies. (The completed scheme as visualized by the artist may be seen in his drawings, at the bottom of the staircase leading to the Print Department just off the Wiggin Gallery. The subject for the vacant area was to be the Sermon on the Mount.)

Sargent traveled to Egypt, Greece, and Palestine to study the ancient pictorial and plastic conceptions of the gods and goddesses of idolatry and polytheism, although their interpretation is naturally his own.

The entire work is one of great power. The artist has taken familiar ideas and invested them with new forms and vigor. Despite the diversity of subject matter, the whole is unified and interrelated with a sympathy and passion clearly demonstrating the genius of its creator.

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Plasticized cards giving the narrative details of each series of murals may be found in the area of the paintings themselves.

THE PUBLIC LIBRARY OF THE CITY OF BOSTON
BUILT BY THE PEOPLE AND DEDICATED TO
THE ADVANCEMENT OF LEARNING

ONE OF THE INSCRIPTIONS ENGRAVED ON THE FRONT OF THE CENTRAL LIBRARY BUILDING

"ART" BY BELA PRATT

"Art" and "Science" by Pratt

As the visitor approaches the Central Library Building, perhaps the first objects to catch his eye are the two large bronze statues on the platform in front of the entrance. These are the famous figures of "Art" and "Science" done by the Boston sculptor, Bela Pratt, and set in place in late spring, 1912.

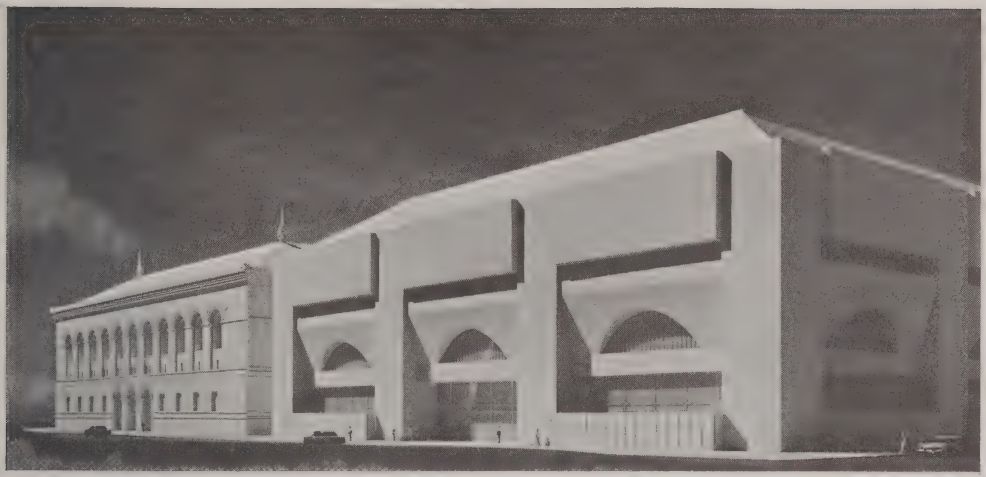
Mr. Pratt was a graduate of the Yale School of Fine Arts, and a student of Augustus St. Gaudens both in New York and Paris. Other works by the sculptor include various figures and medallions at the Library of Congress; the statue of Bishop Brooks at the Phillips Brooks House, Cambridge, Massachusetts; and the Butler Monument, Lowell, Massachusetts.

The figures, as described by the artist himself, denote "Science" and "Art," the sisters of "Literature" represented by the Library. As the visitor faces the building "Art" is on the right side and "Science" on the left. The marble blocks on which the statues have been placed are inscribed with the names of great men in art and science. The figures are of heroic size, and were designed, with the marble blocks, to make a low broad mass, very simple and in harmony with the shape and character of the library building.

Dr. George W. Gay, whose office was on Boylston Street near Copley Square, wrote to Josiah H. Benton, President of the Library's Board of Trustees, in a letter dated June 7, 1912, referring to "Art" and "Science":

"Dignified, majestic, thoughtful, character personified, they are eminently appropriate for the place and surroundings. Everything in this world is criticized and doubtless these statues will be, but an ordinary person, who appreciates fine work, can see little, if anything, that will justify change or criticism."

These are sentiments which are as valid today as they were when they were first written, over a half-century ago.



THE NEW ADDITION, designed by Philip Johnson, to the BPL's Central Library Building (left) in Copley Square.

The Central Library in the Future: The New Addition

On February 1, 1967, Boston's Mayor John F. Collins and the Library's Trustees announced that they had approved the architect's design for a $23,000,000 addition to the Central Library Building.

The New Addition is badly needed because of a vastly enlarged book collection (from 628,297 volumes in 1895 to more than 2,840,000 volumes in 1970); because of increasing patronage—during 1970 the count of people entering the Central Library was over 1,000,000—a result of both the population and knowledge explosions, neither of which will decline in the near future; and because dependence on the Central Library is steadily growing, as the Library assumes its role as the reference and information center not only for the city, but also for the metropolitan and regional areas, and for the state as a whole.

The Architect and the Building

Philip Johnson of New York was appointed by the Trustees as the principal architect for the New Addition. He will be assisted by Architects Design Group, Inc., of Boston. Mr. Johnson has an international reputation and is highly esteemed for his designs for the New York State Theater, Lincoln Center; the Nuclear Reactor, Rehovat, Israel; the annex to the Museum of Modern Art, New York; and the famous Four Seasons Restaurant in the Seagram Building, New York.

The New Addition of 480,000 square feet will occupy the entire block behind the present building, which is bounded by Boylston, Exeter, and Blagden Streets.

The Addition will have a height and roof line that will conform to those of the present building, and its exterior will be faced with the same type of granite as that used for the existing structure. The quarry is being specially reopened to provide the stone for the new façade. It will have eight floors and a mezzanine level. Two complete floors will be below ground and will house a 300-seat auditorium, rooms for films and recordings, storage space, and space for mechanical equipment. The auditorium will be the center for the Library's dynamic educational programs. These have included children's story hours, film showings, exhibitions, and lectures.

The main entrance will be on Boylston Street, from which the patron can easily reach the Main Floor, Lower Concourse,

Mezzanine, and Second Floor. Administrative offices and book stacks will occupy the Third Floor, with book stacks entirely filling the upper three floors.

The first three floors will provide library users with ready access to a well-selected collection of more than one-half million volumes. These will be on open shelves so that the patron himself will be able to go directly to the shelves. This will save time, and allow him to browse for a while before choosing his book.

Groundbreaking for the New Addition took place on June 6, 1969.

The Design

Designing a building the size of the New Addition to complement another which is recognized as an architectural monument presents many problems. An addition in the same style would have been impossible. Even if it were desirable, workers who could do the detailed stonecutting are no longer available. An adaptation—a compromise between old and new—is not the answer either. Compromises are rarely pleasing, being a little bit of one thing, a little bit of another, and having no individuality of their own.

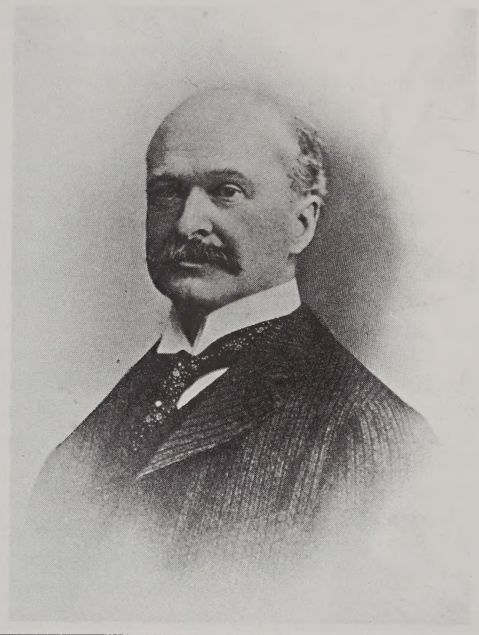
In the case of the New Addition the result has been the inauguration of a completely new style, one which, it is hoped, will prove to be a milestone in architectural history. The style is very pure, very simple, and very functional, with no relationship to Modern Baroque with its active, twisting lines. The building is a unified whole, both inside and out, and repeats the basic rhythm of threes in the present building.

Both the façade and the interior court, which will rise seven stories, give the building a soaring effect, one which is not readily apparent in the plastic model with its smooth sides, and without the play of light and shade that the rough granite will have.

The similar ridge line of the roof and the pitched roof itself lend a sense of compatibility rather than jarring competition, and there are other subtle points of contact as well. The rhythm of the three sections into which each side has been divided has already been mentioned. The three half-moon-shaped forms corresponding to the three archways and the high windows are two others. However, many other facets of the design express the feelings of the architect, and do not coincide with features in the present building.

The New Addition should be ready for occupancy by 1972.

Notes



CHARLES FOLLEN McKIM

1847 ARCHITECT 1909

FAITHFUL SERVANT OF THE ARTS
INCOMPARABLE FRIEND TO YOUTH
HONOURED MASTER OF THE PROFESSION
IN THIS BUILDING ENDURINGLY IS REVEALED
THE SPLENDID AMPLITUDE OF HIS GENIUS
AN INSPIRATION TO ALL MEN

Inscription on the memorial tablet at the foot of the stairway leading to the third floor of the Central Library Building, dedicated on March 3, 1931, by the Boston Society of the American Institute of Architects.

CITY OF BOSTON PRINTING SECTION